

---

## Stem cell awareness, poetry, and the blues

Posted: October 6, 2010

Created: 06/10/2010 - 15:16

Stem Cell Awareness Day is underway, which is both true and practically rhymes, making it a fitting opening for a post about poems.

We held the second annual poetry contest this year in conjunction with events and seminars being held worldwide. Entries were judged by Don Reed, sponsor of the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act and stem cell blogger, and Margaret Hermes, MA in poetry from Boston University, a PhD from Indiana University and a practicing poet and teacher.

From among 18 entries hailing from six countries they selected two winners and two finalists. You can read those poems on our official announcement.

But it's not all serious around here when it comes to stem cells. Among my favorite poems are these two non-entries, which weren't in the official contest. One is from Tom Vasich, assistant director of communications at UC Irvine. The other is from Chris Stiehl, who works with CIRM to reach out to patient groups throughout California.

### Just like those pluripotent blues

*By Tom Vasich*

I shot some stem cells in my vein  
With hopes that they would reach my brain  
And trigger many proteins there  
To help grow back my missing hair

The stem cell source was highly pure  
And guaranteed to spark a cure  
Their lineage was unapproved  
Which the DOJ so doth moved

"Illegally pluripotent"  
Said the letter I was sent  
"Are those cells now in your melon  
Take them out or you're a felon"

Too late, the cells had taken hold  
To which my mien grew thick and bold  
What should have been a source of pride  
Under a cap I now must hide

So how I fell into this mix  
I place the blame on politics  
Should I vote for a Democrat  
Who'll free me to remove my hat?

Or should I move to Mexico  
Where I can let my new hair grow?  
By choosing how I want to live  
I now become a fugitive

Oh, somewhere in this world so bright

People have the legal right  
For stem cell usage as they choose  
I've got those pluripotent blues

### **Stem Cell Research at the Bat**

*By Chris Stiehl*

An adaptation of "Casey at the Bat"  
by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The Outlook wasn't brilliant for the Stem Cell nine that day;  
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play.  
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,  
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest  
Clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;  
They thought, if only Research could get but a whack at that -  
We'd put up \$3 billion, now, with Research at the bat.

But McCulloch preceded Research, as did also Jimmy Till,  
The former was a quondam doctor and the latter was too young still;  
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,  
For there seemed but little chance of Research's getting to the bat.

But McCullough let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,  
And Till, the bio-physicist, tore the cover off the ball;  
And when their Nature piece was published, and the men saw what had occurred,  
There was Jimmy safe at second and McCullough a-hugging third.

Then from 5,000 throats and more there rose a lusty yell;  
Prop 71 rumbled through California's central valley, it rattled in the dell;  
It knocked upon the Sierras and recoiled upon the flat,  
For Research, mighty Research, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Research's manner as he stepped into his place;  
There was hope in Research's studies and renewal on Research's face.  
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,  
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Research at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he injected marrow into mice;  
Five thousand tongues applauded when stem cells grew like rice.  
Then while the litigious pitcher ground the ball into his hip,  
Defiance gleamed in Research's eye, a sneer curled Research's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,  
Research stood a-watching it; with scientific curiosity, not despair.  
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped-  
"That ain't my style," said Research. "Strike one," the judge had said.

From the benches, from hope-filled people, there went up a muffled roar,  
People awaiting cures and treatments, like waves upon a distant shore.  
"Kill him! Kill the judge!" shouted someone on the stand;  
And its likely they'd a-killed him had not Research raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Research's visage shone;  
He stilled the rising tumult; CIRM bade the game go on;

Research signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;  
But Research still ignored it, and the judge said, "Strike two."

"Fraud!" cried the labs and scientists, and echo answered fraud;  
But one scornful look from Research and the audience was awed.  
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,  
And they knew that Research wouldn't let that funding ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Research's lip, to the chucker he shouts "Curtains!";  
His firmness of conviction makes the outcome predictable, certain.  
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,  
And now the air is shattered by the force of Research's blow.

Somewhere in this great land of ours it's cloudy, there is no sun;

And somewhere cytoplasts are no longer studied, investigators have no fun;

And somewhere over silent labs there hangs a heavy pall;  
In California, Stem Cell hearts are happy now--for Research hit the ball.

A.A.

**Tags:** University of California Irvine, Stem cell awareness day

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.cirm.ca.gov/blog/10062010/stem-cell-awareness-poetry-and-blues>